

Duxbury Clipper, Thursday, February 4, 1982

## Duxbury's Winter Recreation Then And Now

By THEREV. CANON ROBERT E. MERRY

It really brought back memories: the deep snow with crust on top, the piercing cold wind, and the thrill of bounding down a hillside with snow bursting all around the sled. Beatrice Jackson and her son Chad and Scotty and Jeff Armstrong from nearby Oakwood Ave. and Josh Mailer from across the street had come over to use our hill that wintry day, and I remembered the great days of winter when I was growing up in Duxbury, and the various winter sports we enjoyed, so different as a general rule from today, hence this sight was a real throwback.

Sled-riding was the most common winter sport, and for us who lived in the "village" (the Washington St. area), Clapp's hill across from Pilgrim Church was the great magnet. There were no trees then, as there weren't in many areas in Duxbury (Ford's pasture off Rte. 14 and Captain's Hill as well were barren hillsides). I recall our building snow and ice mounds half way down the hill, which would send you flying off into space for a brief moment, and if you had a good start you could wind up behind the old Blacksmith shop and Josselyn's Variety Store (now the Snug Harbor gasoline station) and often far out on the bay ice.

recreation spots. Ralph Blakeman recalls dragging his sled to school, standing it against the schoolhouse and sliding after school almost all the way back to his home in the hollow below. Priscilla (Swanson) Harris recalls their sled-riding with her brothers and sisters down Mountain Ave. in nearby Pembroke, where the town highway department had closed off the road for their enjoyment. She recalls also skating across the cranberry bog ditches to Chandler's Pond, where they would build a huge bonfire on the ice, and skate in cotillions all over the pond.

We village people used to skate on Wright's Dike, a man-made pond created by damming up one of the 2 major sources of the Blue Fish River that lie between Harrison and St. George streets. A favorite and most exciting sport was "Snap the Whip," which consisted of forming a single line of skaters, all holding hands and skating down the pond as fast as we could, only to put on the brakes and fling the last few skaters to the elements. Of course there were always those who liked to play hockey. One problem with skating was the flimsiness of the skates which consisted of metal strips clamped onto the soles of shoes or screwed on by a metal key. Few could afford shoe skates, as these were reserved for figure skaters and hockey players. Often the clamps would come loose at some critical point and send you sprawling down the ice. There was little skating on the Bay, even though it was frozen over much of the winter because the skate blades would cut too deeply into the mushy salt water ice. There was some dare-devil venturing onto the bay ice, to check out boats that had been left on their moorings, especially Captain Hall's old schooner, grounded just off Bumpus Park and later burned to the water's edge in a series of July 4 celebrations. Most parents forbade their young to set foot on the salt water ice, not only because it was mushy and treacherous, but also because the rising and falling of the tide often made it dangerous. The ice in the middle of Blue Fish River, for example, would be solid but action of the tides made climbing off the river onto the solid bank hazardous. I recall once my brother Henry and I on an errand to deliver a roast of beef to the Reynolds on Surplus St., traveling on the ice in the river as the tide was coming in, and his attempting to make the bank and falling into the icy water when the cake he chose to use for a gangplank slid under the main river ice. It was really cold (around 10 above zero) so he had to run to keep warm. He raced up Knowles Parker's hill with me in reluctant pursuit, over the meadow and into Reynolds Farm. Mrs. Reynolds met him at the door and seeing his clothes frozen stiff on his body, plunged him clothes and all into a tub of hot mustard water. She left him sitting there while she telephoned my father to extract a promise that he would not be punished when he got home.

"This boy has had plenty of punishment already," he said, "and unless you promise not to scold or beat him I'll keep him right here." Fortunately for Henry,



**There were no snow plows when this picture was taken on Surplus St. Residents shoveled the street. You can see the house of the Charles Rogersons and the Henry Stouts on the left.**

Harvey's clothes fitted him well, and clad in a complete set of borrowed garments he made the trip home, this time by way of land.

Skiing was not the sport it has come to be by a wide margin. First of all the mechanical gadgetry that is now used to attach the skis to boots enabling the maneuver of a "slalom turn" was unknown. Again really good skis were expensive. Often we used to fashion them from old barrel staves, with leather holders from cast-off shoes. But these did not allow much maneuvering. Ralph Blakeman remembers using a pair of these home made jobs for his milk route. He would strap his knapsack on his back and place a half dozen bottles of milk in it, and grabbing his home-made ski poles, be off on his rounds wearing his warm leather gloves. One day he recalls being stopped by a motorist heading down High St. toward the Cape (this was the main artery between Boston and Plymouth at this time) with his windshield open although it was bitter cold and snowing. In those days windshield wipers were primitive and with maximum speeds of 35 miles per hour the only practical way to achieve visibility was by opening the windshield. There was no heater in the car and this gentleman had no gloves, so he stopped Ralph and offered him \$2 for the gloves. Since Ralph had only paid 75 cents for them, and the man was in desperate need, he sold them to him on the spot.

Another winter pastime, although it could hardly be called a "sport," was sleighing. There was a kind of rivalry between people who owned horses and sleighs (they were well in the minority -- Ashford at its most populous boasted only 5 horses) to see who would get the sleigh down out of the loft (where it had been stowed since last winter) cleaned and polished and hung with bells and onto the road first. Sleighing "in a one-horse sleigh" was fun once you had the horse hitched and the sleigh ready and you were bouncing over the snow to the sound of bells. Of course when the

automobiles came into popular use and required solid pavement to prevent skidding and slipping, sleighing was doomed. For a few years highway departments humored sleighing lovers by leaving a sleigh track of snow, but this did not last long.

Looking back there was another aspect of winter recreation. It was something extra -- and unnecessary as an "exercise." Who needed "exercise" when as soon as you got home from school we'd have to begin our afternoon family chores? For girls this meant house work and meal preparation (and remember no canned or frozen foods to pour into a saucepan), henyard tending (picking up eggs and feeding and watering the chickens). For the boys it was filling seemingly bottomless woodboxes and feeding and cleaning up and watering the barn animals. One winter our barn water froze and we had to water our horses in the watering trough by the Cable Office flagpole. Townspeople would be surprised to see this trek of horses without bridles or other harness or wagons trotting down across Blue Fish River Bridge and back. There was a sense of belonging to our family life that depended on everyone's doing his share. Is it any wonder our young find diversion in drugs and sex and vandalism? Their energy has to have an outlet. All of which raises an interesting point: we not only did not have the many labor-saving gadgets that have removed the drudgery from housework but we had a self-fulfilling share in the work of the home and family. Now we pay big money for these appliances to eliminate the labor, then we turn around and spend vast sums to provide the outlet of energy the gadgets take away from us. Of course no one wants to turn the clock back, and who is going to get up on a soap box on this issue? It is reassuring however to look back in this day of trying to "live with less" and realize that the life-style of 2 or 3 generations ago was not all that bad viewed in this totality.